

A close-up photograph of two young women with long brown hair, smiling warmly at the camera. The woman on the left is wearing a teal shirt and has her eyes closed in a joyful expression. The woman on the right is wearing a green top and is looking directly at the camera. They are both smiling broadly, showing their teeth. The background is a soft, out-of-focus light blue and green, suggesting an outdoor setting. The text 'What a difference a friend makes' is overlaid on the image in a white, sans-serif font. The words 'What a difference' are in a smaller font size than 'a friend makes', which is split across two lines with 'a friend' on the first line and 'makes' on the second line.

What a difference a friend makes

This brochure is designed to provide you with the tools to help support a friend you know is living with a mental health problem in the recovery process.

Contents

Mental Health: What is it?	3
Recover	5
Support.....	7
Help a friend.....	9
Myths and facts	11
What would you do?	13
Resources	15



100%

Yes, including you.

Every single one of us is affected by mental health problems in one way or another. If that number seems high, keep your eyes open, you'll find more surprising stats throughout the brochure.



Mental Health: What is it?

Mental health problems are health conditions that cause changes in a person's thinking, mood and behavior. Arm yourself with the facts and then use your knowledge to educate others. Understanding and support are powerful, and they can make a real difference in the life of a person who needs them.

Among 18-25 year olds, the prevalence of serious mental health problems are high, yet this age group shows the lowest rate of seeking help. The potential to minimize future disability is increased if the right support is received.

People with mental health problems need to be treated with respect, compassion and empathy, just as anyone with any other serious healthcare condition. One of the most important factors in recovery is the understanding and acceptance of friends.



Recovery

Getting better all the time. One of the most important things to remember about mental health problems is that people can and do recover. Reach out to those around you with compassion, empathy and understanding.

The misperceptions associated with mental health problems are a big barrier to recovery. If we want to be a truly healthy society, we need to break down these misperceptions and treat mental health problems like any other healthcare condition. It starts with you.



Support: How to help

You can help just by being there and offering your reassurance, companionship, emotional strength and acceptance. You can make a difference just by understanding and supporting your friend throughout the course of his or her recovery and beyond. We're here to help you learn how.

A low-angle, close-up photograph of the lower legs and feet of three people walking on a sandy beach. The person on the left is wearing blue flip-flops. The person in the center is wearing white sneakers. The person on the right is wearing purple flip-flops. The sand is dark and textured, with some small pebbles and shells visible. The background is slightly blurred, showing the ocean and a clear sky.

Respond

Instead of blowing off a person's worries, express your interest and concern. Don't change the subject when a mental health condition diagnosis comes up – ask questions, listen to ideas, and be responsive. Ask what you can do to help. If other people make insensitive remarks, don't ignore them – educate people so they understand the facts about mental health problems. If someone you work with or go to school with has a mental health problem, don't discriminate. Treat people with mental health problems just as you would those with any other serious healthcare issue: with respect, compassion and empathy.



Help a friend

If your friend tells you he or she has a mental health problem, read the tips below for what you might say or how you might want to respond:

- ▶ Express your concern and sympathy.
- ▶ Ask how he or she is doing. Really listen to the answers and continue the conversation. Make sure your friend understands you honestly care.
- ▶ Ask what you can do to help. Rides to appointments (or keeping the person company in the waiting room) can ease some of the anxiety people feel when dealing with a mental health problem.

▶ You might also offer to help your friend with errands but be careful not to patronize or make the person feel disempowered.

▶ Let your friend know you still care about him or her, and include him or her in your everyday plans – going out to lunch, catching a movie, taking a jog. If your friend says no, ask again, but without being pushy.

▶ Remind your friend that there is help available for a mental health problem. Offer to help identify community resources and supports if so desired.

▶ If a friend needs immediate help, ask them what kind of help they need and respond immediately. It is important to give them hope and encourage them to seek support, including calling a crisis line, or the National Suicide Prevention Line at **1-800-273-TALK**.

▶ Encourage your friend to seek immediate medical attention if they say they are weak or ill from an eating disorder.

Myths and Facts

MYTH: There is no hope for people with mental health problems.

FACT: There are more treatments, strategies and community support systems than ever before. People with mental health problems lead active, productive lives.

MYTH: I can't do anything for a person with mental health problems.

FACT: You can do a lot, starting with how you act and speak. For example: Don't label people with words like "crazy," wacko" or "loony" or define them by their diagnosis. Instead of saying someone is "a schizophrenic," say he or she "has schizophrenia." Don't say "a schizophrenic person," say "a person with schizophrenia." This is called "people-first" language, and it helps reduce the misperceptions associated with these labels.

MYTH: People with mental mental health problems are violent and unpredictable.

FACT: Actually, the vast majority of people with mental health problems are no more violent than anyone else.

MYTH: Mental health problems are the same as mental retardation.

FACT: These are two different conditions.

Mental retardation is characterized by limitations in intellectual functioning and difficulties with certain daily living skills. In contrast, people with mental health problems have the same varied intellectual functioning as the general population, but have mental health conditions that cause changes in their thinking, mood and behavior.

MYTH: People with mental health problems cannot tolerate the stress of holding down a job.

FACT: All jobs are stressful to some extent, regardless of whether or not the worker has a mental health problem.

MYTH: People with mental health problems, even those who have recovered, tend to be second-rate workers.

FACT: Studies by the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) and the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI) show that there are no differences in productivity when people with mental health problems are compared to other employees.

MYTH: Therapy and self-help are a waste of time. Why bother when you can just take a pill?

FACT: A treatment's effectiveness varies depending on the individual. A lot of people work with therapists, counselors, friends, psychologists, psychiatrists, nurses and social workers; some also use self-help strategies and community supports. Often they combine these with some of the most advanced medications available.

What would you do?

Q

1. If a friend with a mental health problem starts sleeping much of the day?
2. If a friend with a mental health problem repeatedly does not want to go out?
3. If a friend with a mental health problem is not attending class or work regularly?
4. If a friend with a mental health problem is very anxious?
5. If a friend with a mental health problem cuts off communication with you?
6. If a friend confides in you about his mental health problems?
7. If you hear others talking negatively about mental health problems?
8. If you notice a friend with a mental health problem having significant changes in how he is acting (e.g. appetite, sleep)?
9. If you notice a friend with a mental health problem is not performing as he/she usually does at work or in school?

A

1. You can encourage him to go out of the house – take him to a movie or out for coffee.
2. You can go to her home and be supportive by hanging out with her, talking and by just being a friend.
3. You can call or visit him and be understanding, empathetic and encouraging.
4. You can be reassuring and avoid belittling or patronizing these concerns.
5. You can be persistent by continuing to call and visit her – to let her know you are there for her.
6. You can be non-judgmental, treat him as you always have and continue to be a support for him.
7. You can educate them that people with mental health problems deserve respect and dignity.
8. You can encourage him to talk with you about what's going on.
9. You can check in with her to see how she is doing and how you can help. It can be as simple as helping her with studying.

Resources

What do you know about mental health problems? If you're like most people, the answer is probably, "Not a lot!" but that's OK – we've pulled together some of the best resources for you so that you can learn about mental health problems and how people can recover from it.

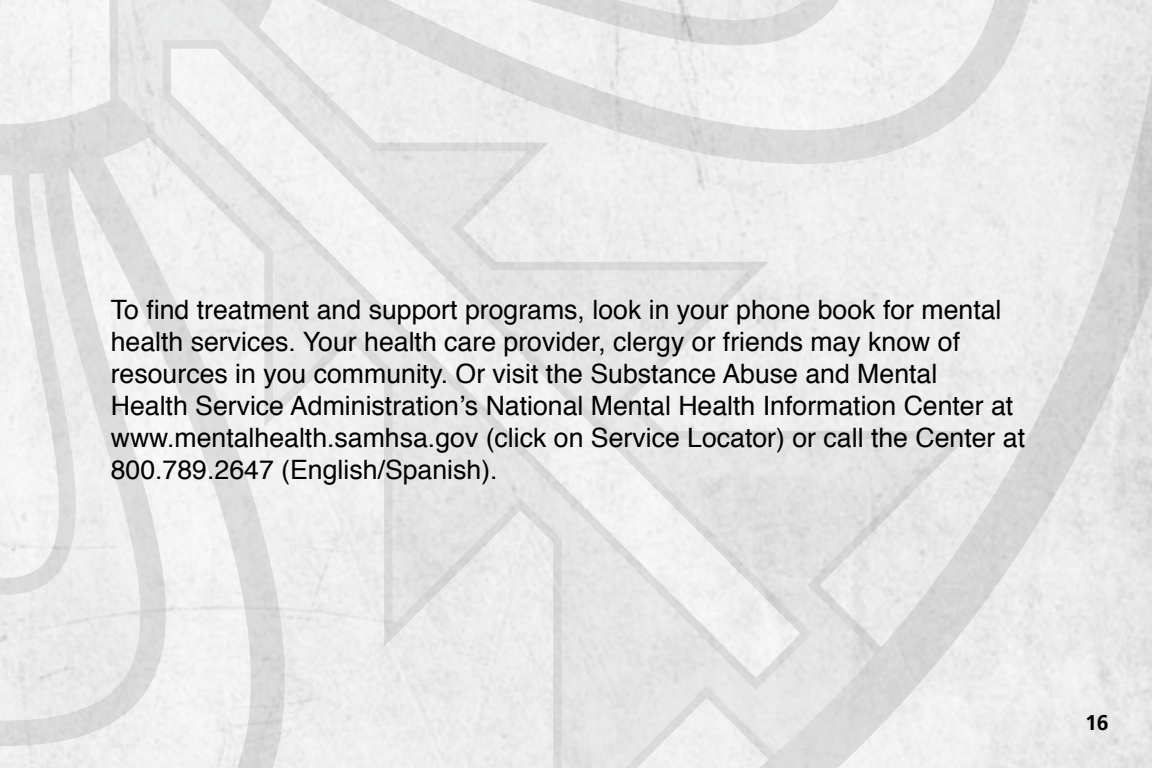
SAMHSA's National Mental Health Anti-Stigma Campaign:
www.whatadifference.samhsa.gov

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA):
www.samhsa.gov

National Mental Health Information Center (NMHIC):
mentalhealth.samhsa.gov

Resource Center to Address Discrimination and Stigma (ADS Center):
www.promoteacceptance.samhsa.gov

What To Do When a Friend is Depressed:
www.nimh.nih.gov/publicat/friend.cfm



To find treatment and support programs, look in your phone book for mental health services. Your health care provider, clergy or friends may know of resources in you community. Or visit the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration's National Mental Health Information Center at www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov (click on Service Locator) or call the Center at 800.789.2647 (English/Spanish).